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ABSTRACT

This paper examines quality issues in career guidance, counseling, and information services in Europe and elsewhere from a range of different perspectives related to economic, ethical, and/or effectiveness criteria. Selected examples from the European Union member states, Canada, and the United States are used to illustrate how quality is described and measured in terms of statements, guidelines, standards, and hidden customers. National quality standards and national approaches to the definition of quality for the following items are reviewed: delivery of career guidance services; skills and qualifications required of career guidance workers; and occupational and educational information used in career guidance. The needs and adequacy of such standards and definitions are examined. Particular attention is paid to options for their use, their impact on service quality, and the implications of new approaches to career guidance for such standards. The roles of governments and professional career guidance organizations in developing, implementing, and monitoring standards and definitions are explored. The formation of genuine partnerships with national and international nongovernmental organizations, development of cross-sectoral cooperation, and establishment of a broad national lead body that includes all relevant partners are suggested as ways governments might raise the quality of career information, guidance, and counseling services. (Contains 40 references) (MN)

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QUALITY IN CAREERS GUIDANCE

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A paper prepared for an OECD review of policies for information, guidance and counselling services

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THE BRIEF

This paper:

- Provides an overview and examples of national quality standards, and national approaches to the definition of quality, that exist for:
  - The delivery of career guidance services;
  - The skills and qualifications required of career guidance workers; and
  - Occupational and educational information used in career guidance.
- Comments upon the need for and adequacy of such standards and definitions, including:
  - Options for their use;
  - Their impact upon service quality; and
  - The implications of new approaches to career guidance for such standards.
- Comments upon the roles of governments and of professional career guidance organisations in developing, implementing and monitoring such standards and definitions.
- Comments upon practical steps that governments might take to raise the quality of career information, guidance and counselling services.
- Draws upon international evidence, both European and non-European.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the EU Commission or the OECD.

ABSTRACT

Quality issues in careers guidance, counselling and information services are tackled from a range of different perspectives, related to economic, ethical, and/or effectiveness criteria. With selected examples mainly from the USA, Canada, and the EU Member States, this report highlights how quality is described and measured in terms of statements, guidelines, standards or even hidden customers. Some guidelines or standards are aimed at the consumer, i.e. the general public; some are directed towards the guidance professionals and their competencies; others deal with the quality of the information provided in careers guidance and counselling. Power issues lie embedded in such efforts: who defines, maintains and, in particular, controls such guidelines or standards? Finally, possible future quality prospects are outlined in terms of green, ethical and knowledge-based quality criteria.

1 THE BACKDROP

In recent policy documents, both the EU Commission and the OECD have focused on careers guidance and information as key policy areas in terms of life-long learning, and economic and social development. Key EU documents include the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EU Commission, 2000), which explicitly points to guidance as one of 6 central policy areas, opening an avenue for not merely life-*long* learning, but also life-*wide* learning. Life-long and life-wide guidance are closely related to these learning concepts: modern, highly individualised career paths call for and build upon personal (long, wide, and, indeed, deep) guidance, tutoring, mentoring, coaching, counselling. The OECD, in turn, in its report *From Initial Education to Working Life - Making Transitions Work* (OECD, 2000), pointed to the fact that the national and, indeed, the global economy are decisive factors in creating smooth transitions from education to work, but the OECD also included information and careers guidance as key factors. With this backdrop, quality issues in guidance come to the policy-making forefront: career development and careers guidance are pivotal, not only in terms of sustaining economic, societal and personal development, but also in terms of creating a sustainable future, economically, socially, environmentally, and on an individual level.

The present focus on quality issues in careers guidance and counselling is linked with a number of societal trends:

- New Public Management: this involves decentralisation and management by quality control
- Value for Money Policies: cost-benefit issues and immediate usefulness are in focus
- Lifelong Learning: global competitiveness in the knowledge society is a main policy driving force in relation to formal, informal and nonformal learning
- Societal Inclusion: guidance is for the marginalised and excluded as well as people in work; it is a relatively inexpensive measure
- Professionalisation: upgrading competencies and drawing boundaries around careers guidance as a profession are responses to current and future professional challenges.

2 WHAT IS GUIDANCE?

2.1 Guidance Activities

Guidance is much more than a face-to-face interview. SCAGES (Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings, UK, 1992) identified 11 activities of guidance:

- Informing
- Advising
- Assessing

- Teaching
- Enabling
- Advocating
- Networking
- Feeding back
- Managing
- Innovation/Systems change

Moreover, 4 further activities have been added to the list, bringing it up to 15 issues (Ford, 2001):

- Signposting
- Mentoring
- Sampling work experience or learning tasters
- Following up.

As indicated below, only some of these 15 activities are covered in present quality guidelines or standards: in most cases, the main focus is on Informing and Assessing. Even the more comprehensive quality frameworks, for example the British Guidance Council Quality Standards, do not cover the full range of guidance activities. This leads to the reflection that

- There is room for enhancing the coverage of quality issues in terms of activity areas in guidance
- Some issues/areas are relevant for particular guidance services: few services would cover all 15 areas
- Some issues/areas are left out of scope because they are seen as irrelevant, and/or difficult to measure, and/ or politically sensitive.

2.2 Standards or guidelines?

In some countries, quality standards in career guidance build on staff performance or skills/competencies indicators, which are generally quite exhaustive. They comprise, e.g., advocacy, publicity, feedback, and quality assurance procedures (Rivis & Sadler, 1991). Quality assurance work in the UK in particular has included some highly detailed, essentially directive, quality standards. This applies, for instance, to the AGC&PLB (now called CAMPAG) Occupational Standards (1996) which prescribed the competencies of guidance practitioners in great detail (up to about 100 different performance categories at two different levels), and which are now linked to the NACCEG Standards (see Section 5.2). This, perhaps, was overemphasising the need for detailed performance criteria, but the example points to the potential of developing highly detailed descriptions of the competencies and of subsequent control procedures in terms of the actual *performance* of guidance practitioners. In this case, both the competencies and the performance of guidance staff were seen as crucial in determining quality in the guidance and counselling process, as undoubtedly they are. The focus was less on formal qualifications of professional staff. It was how they actually performed which was of interest, not how they were trained to do their job - though in most cases a link between the two exists.

Other standards and guidelines focus on the quality of informational material, and some on delivery or learning outcomes (see Sections 3, 4 and 5). In short, a plethora of perspectives are employed in this field. Distinctions can be drawn between:

- standards relating to inputs and processes v. standards relating to outcomes
- standards derived from the viewpoint of the client/customer v. standards derived from the need for public accountability
- standards that are self-assessed v. standards for external accreditation
- general guidelines v. specific measurable standards.

Some standards or guidelines have been issued by a single professional guidance association; others are produced by a national council as a process of a broader consultation process involving the social partners, governmental departments, users, etc. Paradoxically, with decentralisation becoming a key policy-making principle in many countries, the need for common central/national quality guidelines or standards has grown (Fretwell & Plant, 2001).

In this complex picture, there seems to be a case for distinguishing between *standards* (which tend to be precise, directive, sometimes even rigid, with built-in checking procedures and/or sanctions, economically or otherwise) and *guidelines* which tend to be less directive, more general, and with no sanctions. In Canada, this distinction has been blurred by labelling such documents '*Standards and Guidelines* for Career Development', as depicted in the box below.

Standards, statements, principles, guidelines

English-speaking parts of the world have focused on guidance quality issues in a number of different respects: standards, guidelines, statements of principles, and manuals in the UK, USA and Canada include:

UK:

Hawthorn, R.: *First Steps. A Quality Standards Framework for Guidance Across All Sectors.* London: RSA, 1995.

AGC&PLB Occupational Standards. Welwyn: Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy Lead Body, 1996.

Code of Principles. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 1996.

Quality Standards for Learning and Work. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 1996.

Adult Impartial Quality Standards - for organisations providing impartial services to adults. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

Embedded Impartial Quality Standards - for use by organisations that provide information and advice services in addition to their core business. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

Quality Standards for Use in Schools - with students under 16. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

Quality Standards for Sector-Specific Organisations - for use by organisations such as professional institutions and other sector lead bodies. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

Quality Standards for Service Delivery. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

Good Practice Guidelines for Individual Development in Organisations. National Advisory Council for Careers & Educational Guidance. London: RSA, 2000.

USA:

CACREP Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual, 1994. Revised Edition, 1996. Alexandria, VA: Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 1996.

ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2001. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 2001.

National Career Development Guidelines: K-Adult Handbook, 1996. Revised Edition. Washington, DC: National Occupational Information Coordination Committee (NOICC), 1996.

Canada:

Blueprint for Life/Work Designs. Ottawa, Canada: National Life/Work Centre (NLWC), 1999.

Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development. Ottawa: National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2001.

In any case the issue of ownership is crucial: who 'owns' the standards or guidelines? How are they put to use? With which sort of consequences? How are they interpreted, maintained, developed, and enforced? Who has the power in the process of developing and adapting such standards or guidelines? Do they attempt to cover all guidance settings across sectors? In cases of clarification, who can appeal on the interpretations, to whom, and with which consequences? A number of essential references on quality in career guidance are included in the box above.

The next three sections of the paper depict examples of the present state of affairs in relation to:

- Quality of occupational and educational information
- Qualifications /competencies of guidance staff
- Delivery of guidance.

Quality assurance procedures, standards or guidelines are represented on a continuum ranging from industrial ISO norms to learning, ethical, economic, intellectual capital and sustainability aspects of guidance quality. The interest in such matters is long-standing, as noted in a pan-European publication on *The Quest for Quality* (Bartholomeus et al, 1995).

3 OCCUPATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION QUALITY

3.1 Printed, Computerised, and Internet-Based Information

One of the areas of careers guidance in which introducing quality standards is less complicated, yet still quite comprehensive, is the informational side, which in many cases is predominant in guidance provision (Watts et al, 1991). For example, the American NCDA quality guidelines in this area are highly detailed and cover most aspects related to career information services (see: www.ncda.org). Several sets of guidelines have been issued by the NCDA, including:

- Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of Career and Occupational Information Literature
- Guidelines for the Use of the Internet for Provision of Career Information and Planning Services

- Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of Video Career Media
- Career Software Review Guidelines.

The first of these sets of guidelines acts as a model for the others to some extent. It contains, among its general guidelines, a list of items to help editors of career information: Dating and Revisions, Credits, Accuracy of Information, Format, Vocabulary, Use of Information, Bias and Stereotyping, and Graphics, followed by comprehensive Content Guidelines, all of which contribute to general good editorial performance. Other American standards, focused on web-based career guidance, include standards issued by the National Board for Certified Counselors (see: www.nbcc.org/ethics/webstandards) and, focusing more on the informational side, standards issued by the Association for Computer-Based Systems for Career Information (see: www.acsci.org/standards2). These documents follow the American tradition of detailed standards: in relation to the quality of web-based guidance and information, such issues as confidentiality and reliability are of particular importance.

Canada, as mentioned above, has incorporated guidelines on information-related issues in their Guidelines and Standards: again they are highly detailed in structure and simple in terms of contents.

Denmark has issued a Declaration of Career Information (with a focus on information on training/educational options), i.e. a list of headings to be covered in all types of career information, regardless of the chosen media (RUE, 2001):

- Identification (who is imparting what to whom)
- Goal (aims, target group, usage)
- Contents (theme, coverage, style)
- Medium (availability in different formats: hard copy, computerised)
- Structure (organised sequentially or as hypertext)
- Accessibility (computer specification; audio version of printed or computerised material).

Similarly, Dutch guidelines in this field comprise a Code of Course Information Material (LDC, 1995). This contains a checklist with simple headings:

- Aim
- Content
- Presentation

It proceeds to list 28 checkpoints (A 1-12: General; B 1-7: Specific: C 1-9: Facilities) all to be ranked on a 0-2 scale (from no evidence, over neutral, to positive evidence).

The scope for umbrella organisations, governmental and NGOs alike, to issue guidelines on career information, is evident. It provides a relatively easy and cheap area in which to issue quality guidelines. Applying such standards or guidelines, however, is far more difficult, especially in the present versatile and volatile media environment. Standards or guidelines on career information, for good reasons, deal with the tip of the information iceberg, i.e. material produced and designed as career information. No guidelines address the more clandestine type of information which is imparted every day in, e.g., TV series, sitcoms, documentaries, web-sites, and email-based guidance, in which a multitude of role models are depicted along with more or less biased and distorted information. Thus, the informational aspect of sustaining quality in career guidance and information, which looks relatively simple at first sight, and

which is already promoted in some countries by clear guidelines, in fact turns out to be complicated and controversial. And probably impossible to implement in relation to modern integrated media.

4 STAFF QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCIES

4.1 Professionalisation, licensure, standards and guidelines

In an attempt to secure the overall quality of career guidance, the German Association of Career Counsellors (dvb) maintains a Directory of Certified Career Counsellors. This directory is seen as important to secure transparency to clients of the formal competencies of guidance practitioners. The Institute of Career Guidance in the UK also now maintains a Register of Guidance Practitioners. This sort of strategic move is paralleled in other, more commercialised guidance cultures, e.g. in the USA where licensing forms a significant part of the path to professionalisation: licensure is an important feature in 44 states (and the District of Columbia) (see: www.counseling.org). These regulations are linked with the quality assurance program offered by CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs), whereby the quality of the training and education of professional careers guidance staff is regulated and maintained. This includes a lengthy quality assurance process: direct inspection of the premises, the curriculum, staff qualifications, etc.

Further examples of guidelines/standards aimed at guidance professionals are found in the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (see www.career-dev-guidelines.org). They cover Core Competencies and Areas of Specialisation, all based on a Code of Ethics. In this document, Core Competencies are defined as 'the skills, knowledge and attitudes common to all career development practitioners, regardless of their employment setting'. In some work settings core competencies may be sufficient to deliver the range of services provided. Other work settings may require service providers with competency in one or more specialised areas.

Some of the Canadian considerations (summarised in Figure 1) are:

1. People working in career development practice need to demonstrate certain *attitudes*. They need to be:
   - insightful
   - honest
   - open-minded
   - results-oriented.
2. People working in career development practice need to have certain *skills*. They need to:
   - document client interactions and progress
   - accommodate diversity
   - collect, analyse and use information
   - convey information clearly when speaking and writing.

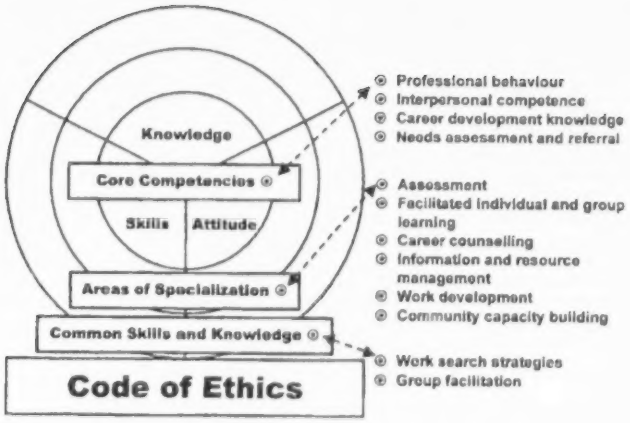

Figure 1. Competency Model for Career Development Standards and Guidelines

3. People working in career development practice need to have certain *knowledge*. They need to know:
   - career development models and theories
   - the change process, transition stages, and career cycles
   - components of the career planning process
   - the major organisations and resources for career development and community services.
4. People working in career development practice need to be guided by a code of *ethical* behaviour:
   - A Code of Ethics forms the basis for these statements, as depicted in Figure 1 above.

The core and speciality areas are equally valued. There is no hierarchy intended between core and speciality or among the specialisations. No area is seen as more or less important than any others. All competency areas are important in providing comprehensive career development services. Currently, six main areas of specialisation have been identified:

- Assessment
- Facilitated Individual and Group Learning
- Career Counselling
- Information and Resource Management
- Work Development
- Community Capacity Building

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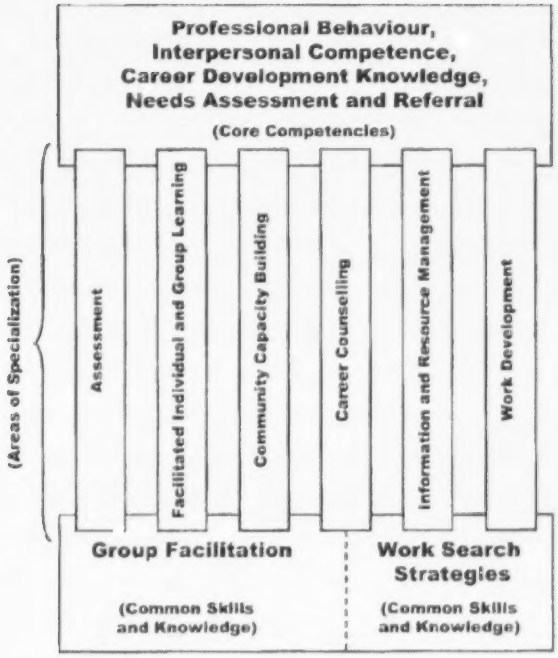

Figure 2. Relationship between Core Competencies, Areas of Specialization and Common Skills and Knowledge

All career development practitioners will need to have a certain number of basic competencies in all six areas of specialisation. Figure 2 illustrates how this relationship might look. The figure presents each specialisation as identical in size, to emphasise that they are all equally important in providing comprehensive services. In practice, however, it is likely that the extent to which the areas of specialisation extend into the core will vary across specialisations. It is also likely that the different specialisations will require varying amounts of competencies and likely different types and/or amounts of training and experience to be able to demonstrate the competencies.

In short, as illustrated in this example, quality issues are linked with the competencies and/or performance of professional guidance staff. More specific indicators are often used to clarify and differentiate specific skills or competencies.

The Canadian examples are products of nation-wide and cross-sectoral efforts. They point to some of the benefits of cross-boundary co-operation in terms of establishing quality guidelines: it takes both governmental, NGOs and professional bodies to put together such guidelines, especially in the fragmented field of career guidance and counselling. With so many actors and stakeholders, the role of one institution, professional association or governmental body would be too limited, and, in particular, would leave large groups of professionals and policy-makers without the common ownership which is so crucial.

With this backdrop (examples of quality issues in terms of career information and of staff competencies), the next section covers examples of quality approaches in terms of the delivery of guidance.

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5 DELIVERY OF GUIDANCE

5.1 ISO

The ISO quality system is based on an industrial model: it focuses on quality procedures, rather than on actual quality performance. It defines quality as: 'The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implemented needs' (Borch, 1995). Using an industrial product-focused quality assurance system is, basically, problematic, insofar as services, including guidance services, have a number of common characteristics (ibid, p. 70):

- Intangible and difficult to measure
- Cannot be stocked
- Difficult to evaluate before purchase
- Tailoring for individual customers is possible and necessary
- Close contact between customer and supplier in the production process
- Production, sale and delivery is often simultaneous
- Little competition from foreign countries.

This is an interesting list, written in a particular terminology: *production* is the key concept. One of the credos of this way of thinking is that 'The customer is the most important part of the production line'. Admittedly, guidance services have customers (or clients or users: the list of concepts applied in this area is sizeable). But does guidance deliver products? This is a basic question. The short answer is no. Nonetheless, the ISO 9000/9001/9002/9003 quality models (international standards for describing quality systems), EFQM (European Foundation of Quality Management) Standards or TQM (Total Quality Management) have been implemented in a small number of guidance services, mainly linked with training centres (in the Netherlands), vocational colleges (in Denmark), employment offices (in Denmark and the Netherlands), or careers guidance centres (in Belgium). Such services are viewed as Knowledge Intensive Service Organisations (KISOs) (Mooijmann & Stevens, 1995). The evidence of quality procedures on such organisation is routinely documented at three different levels, many of which are rare in most guidance settings:

- Strategic level (goals and policies; strategic plans and quality manual)
- Tactical level (procedures and business routines)
- Operational level (blue prints, specifications, printed forms, tools).

The martial terminology (strategic, tactic, operational) is probably acceptable in (line) management, but it sounds unfamiliar to the ears of guidance professionals. Some resistance to ISO in the guidance field may stem from the use of this kind of terminology.

The various quality systems focus on different aspects and approaches, but they all have in common that they are general conceptual frameworks and not focused on career guidance in particular. Some guidance practitioners are highly critical and see the ensuing quality procedures as vastly overdone in terms of quality manuals, kitemarking and other time consuming proceedings (Spracklen, 1995). One commentator maintains that ISO is '...very expensive, very time-consuming, extremely bureaucratic, based on control rather than trust' (Højdal, 1995). With this kind of response, it is not surprising that the

impact of ISO, EQFM and similar quality assurance systems in careers guidance seems to be limited, perhaps because they are seen by the guidance professionals as a rigid top-down control mechanism rather than as a tool for developing the profession and its services.

5.2 Management

Another management-oriented approach is found in the set of quality standard publications from the British National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance (NACCEG; see box in Section 2.1and www.guidancecouncil.com) which are examples of exhaustive, detailed and sector-specific standards, complete with a Complaints Procedure. The framework differs from sector to sector, but generally includes checklists on issues such as:

- Core Standards: Marketing and Promotion, Statement of Service, Staff (competence, development, supervision), Referral, Networking, Monitoring and Feedback
- Additional Standards: Information, Premises, Equipment, Client Records and Other Documents
- Third Party Standards: Clients' Understanding of the Influence of the Third Party, The Third Party/Provider Relationship.

Statements, Criteria, and Measures (e.g.: 85% of respondents say Easy or Very Easy to: 'How easy was it to find out about what was on offer from the provider') are supported by a firm procedure of auditing (YES/NO test by self-assessment), client feedback, staff feedback and even the Mystery Shopper. Using a hidden customer would in some guidance cultures be unacceptable, but seems uncontroversial in the British context. The British NACCEG standards are based on a Code of Principles which corresponds to the Code of Ethical Practices issued by a professional organisation in the field (the Institute of Careers Guidance; see www.icg-uk.org):

- Individual ownership
- Confidentiality
- Equal opportunities
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Accessibility.

Moreover, the NACCEG standards are linked with an accreditation system whereby professional bodies, career companies, schools etc can apply for formal accreditation (with certificate, plaque, etc) from the Guidance Accreditation Board (see: www.gab.org.uk). In addition they complement CAMPAG National Occupational Standards in terms of staff competencies and performance, and on the EFQM Model (European Foundation for Quality Management; see: www.efqm.org) which are intended to measure services' effectiveness in meeting clients' needs. In short, the NACCEG standards are well linked with the UK (and European) management and quality systems, and with the UK career guidance profession. They represent a distinctive approach in which control, management, auditing, client feedback etc are important concepts. They are clearly applied to and part of guidance culture in which clients are seen as *customers*.

Focusing on the guidance process, the next sub-sections contain examples of quality issues in terms of input, process, and, in particular, outcomes, including learning outcomes and economic outcomes.

5.3 Input-Process-Output

As an example of a robust, albeit somewhat mechanistic, model of quality assurance methods, a simple Input-Process-Output model has been suggested (Hawthorn, 1995). Eurocounsel (an action research programme on guidance/counselling and its role in terms of combating unemployment) contained a similar Evidence and Methods instrument based on three basic concepts (Watt, 1998):

- Access (clients targeted, physical/social/linguistic access, etc)
- Process (objectives, organisation, monitoring, time spent with clients, guidance interviews, information, quality assurance systems, etc)
- Output (number of people taking up job/training/education, cost/benefit, value for money, etc).

This list seems fairly straightforward, although some of items are much harder to verify than others: it is easier to count client flow in terms of numbers than it is to make a plausible cost/benefit analysis. Nonetheless such uncomplicated frameworks (basically an Input/Process/Output model) are interesting as examples of endeavours to simplify quality work in guidance, in contrast to more complicated, rigid and bureaucratic models. The challenge is to make quality work manageable.

5.4 Learning Outcomes

Two further developments (see box in Section 2.2) are worth focusing on: those from NOICC (National Career Development Guidelines, USA) and the National Life/Work Centre (Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, Canada). They represent developments over a decade in North America, in so far as the Canadian Blueprint builds explicitly on the NOICC Career Development Guidelines, which in turn initially date back to the late 1980s (see www.noicc.gov & www.lifework.ca for more detailed analysis). It is interesting to note that the NOICC statements (1996) with respect for example to *adults*, in the common categories (a) 'Self-Knowledge', (b) 'Educational and Occupational Exploration', and (c) 'Career Planning', include such competencies as:

- Skills to maintain a positive self-concept (a)
- Skills to maintain effective behaviours (a)
- Skills to participate in work and lifelong training (b)
- Skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information (b)
- Understanding the continuing changes in male/female roles (c)
- Skills to make career transitions (c).

The Canadian Blueprint, likewise, operates on the basis of 'Competencies and Indicators', and spells them out in four different levels for each of the three categories: (a) 'Personal Management', (b) 'Learning and Work Exploration', (c) 'Career Building'. In all, eleven Competencies are indicated, each in some detail, with 4-7 sub-indicators. The focus is on the *learning aspects* of guidance: the 44-item Blueprint matrix of learning at different levels may be used as a checklist in terms of learning outcomes quality and coverage, providing a map of guidance activities, and, in particular, of progression in learning through guidance. Even at this level of itemising, the Canadian guidelines are not as detailed (or, indeed, as prescriptive) as are many of the other above-mentioned standards and guidelines. The reason for the difference lies in the focus on learning outcomes of guidance: individual learning outcomes are best described in somewhat loose terms. This particular aspect of quality in guidance has a long history: it has

included, for example, DOTS, a list of learning outcomes, originally dating back to 1977, which is still vigorous (Law, 2000):

Decision-making skills

Opportunity awareness

Transition skills

Self awareness.

5.5 Economic Outcomes

Quality issues in guidance are often linked with other (related) phenomena. One of the links, in recent years, has been a growing interest in the relationship between the social and economic goals of guidance: the effects and effectiveness of guidance have been studied, along with cost-benefit ratios. Few evaluations have considered, specifically, the quality of economic outcomes of guidance itself, although implicit assumptions on the effects and effectiveness of different measures have been made. One of the difficulties of measuring economic outcomes of guidance is the obvious one that it is very difficult to establish control groups, which are not affected by specific interventions. First of all, it would be morally questionable to deprive certain groups of services which were given to everybody else; and secondly, guidance is difficult to disentangle from other forms of information and inspiration, from the influence of peer advice, the media, and chance, and from other elements of schemes of which they are an integral part.

Potentially, guidance offers benefits to individuals, education and training providers, employers, and governments. Guidance can play a role in fostering efficiency in the allocation of human resources, and social equity in access to educational and vocational opportunities. This is some of the policy rationale behind guidance provision in general. In economic terms, guidance can assist the operation of the labour market in three main ways (Killeen et al, 1992):

- by supporting individual decisions (labour supply decisions, human capital decisions, and job search decisions)
- by reducing labour market failures (drop-outs from training, mismatch, discouraged workers)
- by contributing to institutional reforms designed to improve the functioning of the labour market (open learning, job-and-training rotation schemes, etc.).

Internationally, some research projects on the economic aspects of guidance have been carried out. But most have experienced considerable methodological difficulties:

- The effects of guidance are not likely to be visible for some time.
- The longer the time that elapses, the more factors other than guidance come into play.
- Controlled trials are the surest method of distinguishing effects from mere consequences. But such trials are difficult to mount, and more so over longer periods: control cannot be indefinitely extended, nor guidance indefinitely denied.
- If the purpose of guidance is to help individuals to clarify and implement their own goals, this makes it difficult to find appropriate standardised criteria against which to evaluate the outcomes.

In short, it is a field with many pitfalls, as OECD (1992) has acknowledged. Moreover, the economic value of guidance as such, especially in integrated approaches (educationally based guidance, for instance), is difficult to disentangle from other activities and interventions. On the other hand, guidance is clearly in a number of respects part of an overall attempt to create and obtain benefit from economic growth, the assumption being that economic growth will create more jobs. In this context, guidance is regarded as a cost-effective measure to curb unemployment, which in turn is seen as a waste of human and economic resources. The economic rationale for a number of specific guidance activities is that they may shorten the periods of unemployment, create greater flexibility in the labour market, or support mobility. In these broad terms, the quality of guidance is linked with its role as a market-economy facilitator, with a supposed economic impact, even if this is seldom in fact measured and documented.

With accountability being moved up the agenda in most parts of the public sector, guidance in some EU countries, especially in the UK and the Netherlands (Watts et al, 1993), is measured with an economic yardstick: how much does guidance cost, and does it pay? One step further into this concept, guidance itself is put on the market, either through privatisation, or via guidance vouchers, as was the case in the UK as an experiment (Hawthorn & Wisdom, 1992). In these terms, a market in guidance itself is created, where, ultimately, non-profitable parts of guidance could be discarded at the expense of more vulnerable users, thus excluding the long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups, whereas employed individuals would be able to pay for an extended service. In other guidance cultures, such market-oriented developments are not encouraged, or, indeed, seen as signs of quality in guidance.

5.6 Quality Assurance and Indicators

Historically, there has been a profound interest in many 'developed' countries in measuring guidance, but from different perspectives. During the first half of the 1900s, the interest was linked with the then prevailing psychometric testing tradition, where measurement was the very essence of guidance. Interestingly, this tradition was abandoned in some countries, e.g. Denmark, for a number of reasons, both technical ones (the reliability and relevance of such tests were questioned), and political ones (testing was seen as a tool for untimely segregation, and a violation of human rights and equal opportunities in the broad sense) (Plant, 1996).

In recent years, evaluations of the public sector have been numerous in many countries, especially in terms of quality assurance exercises. Thus, in terms of guidance, a study on the quality of Danish career guidance, listed a number of generic quality indicators (Undervisningsministeriet, 1992):

- Client-centredness
- accessibility, transparency and coherence of the services
- well trained guidance staff
- valid, precise and comprehensive careers information
- referral to other guidance specialists
- follow-up.

This short list was expanded somewhat in more recent guidance policy papers (RUE, 1998 & 1999), where issues such as the value and quality of cross-sectoral linkages were added, along with a renewed emphasis on the need for 'well trained guidance staff'. In these reports, quality issues were linked with ethical considerations, thus incorporating the Danish Ethical Guidelines for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE, 1995) as a foundation stone for good quality in guidance. Again, as in the case with the Danish quality guidelines, the ethical guidelines are short, simple and somewhat uncontroversial;

yet, in fact, not very operational in terms of everyday careers work. They are not enforced in any way and contain no quality indicators. They include broad statements/requirements such as the need of guidance to be:

- client-centred
- impartial & independent
- open
- confidential
- correct (in terms of e.g. updated information).

The extent to which such guidelines are put to use in careers work is not known, as in many other countries. No evaluations of the impact of quality or ethical guidelines have taken place, as yet. The Danish examples are probably typical of many decentralised guidance communities with little tradition for centralised guidelines and regulation enforcement. In contrast to the rather liberal Danish ethical guidelines, the Swedish ones are much more radical in societal terms. For Swedish careers guidance professionals it is a 'moral obligation to care for weak members of society' and to 'actively advance justice and equality'. In these terms a highly proactive professional role is linked with the quality of guidance (Sveriges Vägledarförening, 1996). This is the base for quality in Swedish guidance, in principle. Nonetheless, a recent comprehensive Swedish governmental evaluation points to the need for developing instruments to measure quality and outcomes of guidance (Utbildningsdepartmentet, 2001).

As in the Swedish case, the German career counsellors have felt a need to formulate their own quality standards (Deutscher Verband für Berufsberatung, 2001). They include a list of Tasks & Obligations, Attitudes, Competencies, Organisational Framework, and Quality Assurance.

The American quality related documents in this field include, for example, the NCDA (National Career Development Association) guidelines which are highly specialised in terms of Career Counseling Competencies, Guidelines for Use of the Internet in Career Development, and Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of Career and Occupational Information, to mention the main ones (see: www.ncda.org). Some guidelines (and accreditation procedures) are narrowly focused on one particular type of guidance setting: thus the One-Stop Career Centers in the USA (which are parallelled in many other countries) have their own website with specific quality guidelines (see www.usworkforce.org/onestop).

The ACA (American Counseling Association) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice has established links between ethical guidelines and practice standards. This type of link is common in the field of career guidance, as is the case in most similar professions, e.g. psychology.

Likewise, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) has linked the two sets of guidelines (Ethical and Standards of Practice) quite closely (see: www.iaevg.org), as have the French speaking (Quebec) career counsellors (see: www.orientation.qc.ca), to mention as few characteristic examples. Most such documents stress the importance of the concept of free choice, of human rights, of impartiality, and of equal rights. In terms of staff competencies, empathy, confidentiality, commitment to the well-being of the clients, and the need for continuing personal development are among the core elements. Many such documents are highly detailed, especially in the American culture where they seem to have been written with a view to avoiding potential lawsuits, as well as maintaining high professional standards.

5.7 Mobility: A Quality Outcome?

In Europe, one of the purposes of the Single European Market is to increase personal mobility within the European Union. Career guidance may facilitate such mobility: guidance is part of the globalisation process. The boundaryless career is emerging (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), both physically and metaphorically. Mobility, however, is a coin with two sides: it may improve the quality of life for the mobile, but the processes of mobility tend to leave the immobile behind in poorer conditions. The negative effects of mobility can include segmentation, segregation and marginalisation (Pickup, 1990). In such manpower exporting areas, the loss of dynamic individuals may add to the cultural and economic downward spiral.

In this picture, the role of career development becomes abundantly clear: career guidance/ counselling is a vehicle for economic growth, the irony being that much of the growth is what has been labelled 'job-less growth'. In this capacity, one of its aims is to facilitate personal mobility, i.e. ease the movement of manpower (and students) to economic growth areas, thus serving as a societal lubricant. Economic growth, in terms of career development, may be sustained by scientifically placing people in their proper occupational position: a testing tradition. Historically, in a reaction to the sometimes rather crude and mechanistic methods of psychometric testing, the client was moved to the centre of career guidance in what became known as the 'client-centred' approach: each individual has a potential of personal growth. The guidance practitioner, in this perspective, is seen as a helper in the process of the individual's self-exploration. In terms of economic growth, career counselling helps each individual to unfold his/her potential, thus providing a link between personal growth and economic growth. It follows from this brief historic outline that quality issues differ over time, according to the prevailing professional discourse and the societal circumstances.

Applying market-economy principles to careers guidance and information services implies that guidance either acts as a market facilitator (e.g. by helping to balance demand and supply in the labour market), and/or is a market in itself (e.g. by selling career development services at a market price). The counsellor acts as a human capital investment adviser. But the analysis of cost-benefit ratios falls far behind a number of important issues, e.g. care for the underprivileged or environmental concern. Such issues are not yet high on the economic agenda. Nonetheless, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), for example, has adopted a statement on global Ethical Standards, which focus on important humanistic values, and which include a recognition of the tensions between economic growth and environmental issues (IAEVG, 1995). In short, new concepts are under way to challenge or supplement the paradigm of economic growth as the basic parameter. The next section depicts some examples of such alternative quality concepts.

6 OTHER APPROACHES

6.1 Intellectual and Green

Other forms of measuring output and services (including, potentially, career guidance services) could serve as a corrective to the purely economic angle. Thus, *Ethical Accounting*, a method of describing values, goals and achievements which is used in some companies and educational institutions, could be an additional method in future for measuring the outcomes of career guidance. The economic yardstick is

unidimensional; guidance and counselling are multidimensional interventions and need to include ethical considerations (Plant, 1993; 1994). Other aspects of alternative measuring are found in the *Intellectual Capital Accounts* ('Knowledge Accounts'; see e.g. www.efs.dk, the homepage of the Danish Ministry of Business and Industry, available in English). This method is closely linked with the prevailing methods in Human Resource Development (HRD). One such example is found in the UK-based HRD company Carl Bro (see www.carlbro.co.uk) which identifies two forms of company capital:

- financial capital
- intellectual capital

subdividing the latter into:

- human capital
- structural capital.

Thus, quality statements in Knowledge Intensive Service Organisations (KISOs) are well on their way to being expressed in much broader terms than economic ones. Career guidance is one such KISO.

The *National Competency Account* (Det Nationale Kompetenceregnskab; see www.vismand.dk, also available in English) has now become another well-known method for establishing comparable global competitiveness indicators. Career guidance is embedded in this concept as a key factor.

Finally, *Green Accounting* (environmental performance, 'Grønt Regnskab') may also be creeping up the quality agenda (Plant, 1999; 2000). In political terms, green policies are well established in some countries, e.g. Germany. National sustainability strategies and indicators within the Global Agenda 21 framework are being formulated in some countries (see e.g. www.eco-net.dk, also available in English). Internationally, such organisations as the International Institute for Sustainable Development work along the same lines (see www.iisd.ca). Sustainability is increasingly regarded as an important economic asset, and is now incorporated into mainstream economic thinking. Thus, Dow Jones now runs an internet-based update service on sustainability (see www.sustainability-index.com), stating that '....sustainability companies have superior performances and favourable risk/return profiles because sustainability is a catalyst for enlightened and disciplined management, a crucial success factor'. A pivotal part of 'enlightened management' is career development and career guidance. Thus the quality of careers guidance in the broadest sense is a decisive factor in the success of a modern knowledge-based and sustainability-oriented company.

In short, several other methods than crude economic cost/benefit measurements are already available. They all have in common that they are much broader in their approach, all under development, and all aiming at expressing aspects of performance other than and/or supplementary to the economic one.

7 CONCLUSION

Quality is measured for a number of (related) reasons (Watt, 1998):

- Political reasons: to justify the service
- Funding purposes: to show that the service is worthwhile
- Measure client progress: to assess implementation of planned objectives
- Record what is happening: monitoring
- Strategic planning: organisational development
- Practice & policy development: assessing good practice; bench marking.

One or all may be embedded in specific quality assurance procedures. It seems fair to observe that a number of assumptions about the benefits and quality of guidance are in operation (the reduction of labour market failures and educational drop-outs, etc.), but that few studies have dealt explicitly with, e.g., the economic aspects of guidance. More have dealt with, e.g., customer satisfaction surveys. Conversely, guidance is seen as an investment, which is expected to pay off in broader social terms, for instance in relieving social exclusion and social tensions. The present focus on guidance as an instrument to combat social exclusion (Watts, 2001) underscores the importance and potential impact of guidance. Thus, stronger links are being forged between policy-making and guidance/career development, on both a national and a global level (CCDF, 2001).

In short, without being directly price-tagged, guidance may serve as a societal lubricant in easing the frictions in the labour market, in the educational system, and between the two. These are the main economic aspects of quality in guidance. Such economic aspects are now being supplemented by alternative quality approaches, including ethical, knowledge-based, and sustainability-oriented methods.

Moreover, guidance is a tool for personal development, especially in relation to the need for lifelong and lifewide learning. Quality in this respect is measured in terms of, e.g., educational take-up rates for long-term unemployed or (wo)men returners, job-retaining, job-and-training rotation scheme participation, numbers of personal action plans, portfolios, educational dropout rates etc. Other statements/guidelines/standards (e.g. from AGC&PLB (UK) and CACREP (USA): see box in Section 2.2) focus more on the profession of careers guidance itself: the level of professionalism, the professional competencies (and how they are acquired, measured, maintained, accredited). The latter tend to be highly detailed in order to legitimise high levels of professionalism, and are often linked with a code of ethics as an integral part.

The role for NGOs (national as well as international), partnerships and governmental bodies on all levels is evident in terms of establishing, negotiating, maintaining and enforcing quality guidelines for career guidance and counselling, for career information and for career practitioners. The weak point is the mutual ownership. It takes much more than one partner to establish the cross-sectoral guidelines that are needed in the fragmented and widespread field of career guidance and career development. Thus, cross-sectoral co-operation is needed. To succeed, a broad national lead body must include all relevant partners

(educational and labour-market authorities, social partners, professional career guidance associations etc.) in an earnest mutual developmental process over a period of time, with plenty of room for local and regional discussions and ownership. The examples from the UK (NACCEG), Canada (Work/Life Centre and CCDF) and Denmark (RUE) point in this direction. In some countries, however, establishing such developmental bottom-up procedures would be a major breakthrough in terms of enhancing the synergy, coherence and quality of guidance. The end product, the quality guidelines themselves, may well be less interesting and less dynamic than the process leading up to establishing such guidelines. The key concept is genuine partnership. This approach would create the necessary synergy. It would benefit greatly from being inspired and initiated by transnational bodies such as the EU Commission and the OECD jointly, backed professionally by an international and cross-sectoral Forum of Career Guidance. International leadership in this field, however, needs firm roots at national level. Since guidance and policy-making cultures differ from country to country, quality standards need to be defined at national level or at regional level within a national framework.

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